7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

with which they rubbed the bride's lips, with the idea of rendering her affable and prudent. She was then conducted into the room where her future husband awaited her arrival, who presented her with a ring on which was engraved two hands united—the emblem of mutual faith—together with bracelets, necklaces and a gold chain —she presenting him in return with a handkerchief trimmed with lace and bows of ribbon.

This ceremony is called "il chelma" which means the engagement.

On the morning of the wedding-day the most honoured personage among the husband's relations threw a fine white veil over the bride's head—who wore a brocade or velvet dress, in which the other relations made certain rents for the purpose of affixing small golden shells.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

• 585 The bridal procession then proceeded to the Church for the ceremony, attended by musicians playing on different instruments, and singers who sang stanzas in praise of the young couple. These musicians were proceeded by three men: the first bearing on his head a basin of white earth on which was placed a big cake with two figures, representing the bridegroom and the bride—the man who carried this basin wore also a scarf with a round cake hanging from it. The second [262] [431] carried a basket filled with sugar plums and candied nuts, which one of the relations distributed among such acquaintances he happened to meet. In the middle of the basket was a handkerchief folded in the form of a pyramid, and ornamented with the images of the B. Virgin, St. Joseph, and the

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

Infant Jesus. The third man was constantly employed in burning perfumes. The bride and bridegroom followed, walking under a canopy of crimson velvet carried by four of the principal persons who attended the wedding. The rest of the relations and invited friends, called the *Haddara* closed the procession. 585

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As the newly married couple wended their way to their house, the women and girls who crowded the balconies show-

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

585 ered flowers upon them, also nuts and grains of wheat, and on their entering the house one of the kinsfolk threw from one of the windows or balcony a few handfuls of barley and some small coins on their heads.

The nuptial feast took place immediately afterwards; but the bride ate in a separate apartment. The repast being ended she was seated next to her husband and drank out of the same cup.

[184] [535] [465] [431] At a village wedding the company danced during the feast; each dancer throwing a piece of money to the fiddlers and each guest contributing a fowl to the repast.

[591] The bride always passed a week in her father's house, after which she was received with much pomp by her husband whose relations gave a great feast which was called il *hargia.*

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

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Both Weddings and Funerals are in our duys celebrated in Malta in the same manner as in any other civilized part of the world.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

lieve that those who get married during this month will be unfortunate.

THE CHURCH ORGAN

Many of our country people want the organ to be played during the mass which is celebrated at their wedding, for they believe that if it is not played the couple will not live long together. To show how much some of our country men believe in this superstition, my friend, Mr. P. P. Castagna, gives the following anecdote in his "Storia ta Malta."

Not long ago a young man went to church at Casal Chircop to get married. On finding, however, that the organist did not turn up to play during the mass, he took off his coat threw it on the floor and went out

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

787 in a rage, and he could not be per-
585 suaded to go back to his wedding
533 before the organist could be found and the organ played for the occasion.

PAYING VISITS

273 If a person goes to pay a visit, for
594 the first time, to a party and is not
576 treated with a sort of drink called
825 *zambur* — made of aniseed—a mouse enters the chest of drawers and gnaws all the petticoats of the mistress of the house.

SENDING TO THE OVEN

252 Some people think it a great shame
562 for a woman who sends dishes to be cooked in an oven when her husband is away from the Island.

8:Brockman T-5 (no date) 1938
EZ6 Malta EZ6

at the wrong season and so set right his error. The blessing is accompanied by the burning of leaves of the wild olive which have been blessed in Holy Week. Blessing, accompanied by sacred "fumigation," is very widely used—by fishermen to ensure a good catch, by newly married folk to ensure a happy house.

GETTING MARRIED

Zeppu and Grez will think long and seriously before they get married. In an island where poverty is the rule rather than the exception, and there is no "dole," there can be no haphazard mating. Zeppu will wait until he has a sufficient competence and Grez will contribute her share of the common resources in the form of a "dot" which she, herself, has earned and saved. Until very recently all marriages were arranged by a professional "go-between"—an old woman wise in the ways of the world and in suitable matings. Even now there is little choice left to the girl.

In this matter of marriage, so hedged about with Christian law and custom, the Old Things still command a place. Their hands are perhaps more apparent than in the marriage customs of all other countries—themselves pagan enough in origin.

In the story which has been quoted the month of February is praised, amongst other reasons, because it is then that the "small-leaved basil" is tended and watered. The reference might be rendered "In the Spring a young man's fancy . . ." for the sweet basil is the sign and symbol that a marriageable girl awaits a suitor.

The small bush, either of basil or of the Madonna rose, is carefully tended and placed on the sill of an upper window. A well-grown plant is an indication that the maiden will make a good wife and mother.

A suitor, seeing the "marriage bush" at an upper window,

8:Brockman T-5 (no date) 1938
EZ6 Malta EZ6

584 will walk up and down the village street wearing a red carna-
824 tion behind his right ear and a red handkerchief thrown over his left shoulder. The shy maiden will be peeping from behind the latticed window, probably accompanied by one or two giggling, curious younger sisters.

The symbolic bush has about it something of the atmosphere of the Song of Solomon:

> My beloved is unto me as a
> cluster of camphire in the vineyards of En-Gedi . . .
>
> I am the Rose of Sharon and
> the lily of the valleys. . . .
>
> A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse . . .
>
> Awake, O North Wind; and come, thou south;
> blow upon my garden that the spices
> thereof may flow out.
> Let my beloved come into his garden,
> and eat his pleasant fruits.

[822] The red carnation and the red handkerchief, badges of the
[171] lover, are of that colour which is sacred to Venus. The wearing of the flower has its parallel amongst the Polynesians, to whom a red flower behind the right ear means "I am looking for a sweetheart."

584 Official "courting" will not begin until the "go-between" and the parents have arranged matters to everybody's satisfaction.

• 585 After the religious ceremony the young folk separate,
801 returning to their homes for a period of eight days before
171 setting up house. The reason for the choice of the number "eight" may not be without significance; for eight, it is said, was one of the signs of the goddess Astoreth, while the ancient Egyptians had a company of eight gods who were the Fathers and Mothers of the World. The double form of the figure "8"

8:Brockman T-5 (no date) 1938
EZ6 Malta EZ6

was anciently used to represent the tying of Life with Spirit. Its association with the "True Lovers' Knot" of our grandmothers is obvious. There is Biblical authority, too, for the separation of husband from wife, in the incident between Tobias and the Angel Raphael.

Tobias (or Tobit) is about to be wedded to the maiden whose former seven husbands have been slain on the bridal night by an evil spirit. The angel says, "For they who in such manner receive matrimony as to shut out God from themselves to their lust, as the horse and mule, which they have not understanding. Over them the devil hath power. . . . Keep thyself continent from her. . . ."[1]

So far the marriage customs which remain extant—only one or two generations separate Zeppu and Gretz from the more primitive customs. Here is what a Maltese writer has to say of marriages in the not very distant past:

> "The articles of the contract having been settled, and the marriage portion agreed upon, the young man sent his intended bride a present consisting of a certain fish ornamented with garlands of ribband, with a ring or some costly jewel in its mouth.
>
> The first interview was then fixed to take place in presence of the parents and their kinsfolk, best friends, and neighbours, who were regaled with sweetmeats and other refreshments.
>
> Before this meeting took place, the mothers of the two young people retired either into an arbour in the garden or some separate apartment, where they prepared a mixture of aniseed, aromatic plants, salt, and honey with which they rubbed the bride's lips, with the idea of rendering her affable and prudent. She was then conducted into the room where her future husband awaited

[1] *Tobias*, VI, 17–18.

8:Brockman T-5 (no date) 1938
EZ6 Malta EZ6

584 her arrival, who presented her with a ring on which
[301] was engraved two hands united—the emblem of mutual faith—together with bracelets, necklaces, and a gold chain—she presenting him in return with a handkerchief trimmed with lace and bows of ribbon.

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[532] pened to meet. In the middle of the basket was a handkerchief folded in the form of a pyramid and ornamented with the images of the Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, and the Infant Jesus. The third man was constantly employed in burning perfumes. The bride and bridegroom followed, walking under a canopy of crimson velvet carried by four of the principal persons who attended the wedding. The rest of the relations and invited friends, called the *Haddara*, closed the procession.

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8:Brockman T-5 (no date) 1938
EZ6 Malta EZ6

The officiating priest was then presented with a basin containing a cake, a handkerchief, and two bottles of wine—the usual fee on such occasions. When the marriage ceremony was completed, everyone returned from church in the same order as before.

As the newly married couple wended their way to their house, the women and girls who crowded the balconies showered flowers upon them also nuts and grains and wheat, and on their entering the house one of the kinsfolk threw from one of the windows or balcony a few handfuls of barley and some small coins on their heads.

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At a village wedding the company danced during the feast, each dancer throwing a piece of money to the fiddlers and each guest contributing a fowl to the repast.

The bride always passed a week in her father's house, after which she was received with much pomp by her husband, whose relations gave a great feast which was called *il hargia*."[1]

The bridegroom's symbolic present of a fish is very likely connected with fecundity, for the fish was regarded as an emblem of fecundity by the Assyrians and the Phoenicians. It is not, however, in this connection alone that the fish is a potent symbol. Prudence (apparently a virtue highly prized in a Maltese wife—Salt, another symbol of prudence, is included in the ingredients with which the bride's lips are anointed), and Wisdom were anciently supposed to be the properties of numerous Sacred Fish. Finn M'Cull, in the Irish legend, "Happens upon the Salmon of Knowledge . . ."

[1] BUSUTTIL, op. cit.

8:Brockman T-5 (no date) 1938
EZ6 Malta EZ6

174 584 825 which conferred on him "such Wisdom, Prowess, and good fortune . . . that Fame and Prosperity always attended him thereafter." Tennyson, describing his mystic Lady of the Lake, has:

> And o'er her breast floated the Sacred Fish.

The Saviour Himself was symbolized by the early Christians as a fish. Julius Africanus, an early Christian writer, said of Christ that He was the Great Fish, caught by the Hook of God, whose flesh nourishes the whole world.[1]

This bridal fish, then, may be in some sense a sacramental offering as well as a mere symbol.

534 789 828 The anointing of the bride's lips is yet another custom which, like the miniature "garden inclosed" of the marriageable girl, recalls the Canticle of Canticles:

> Thy lips my spouse are as a dropping honeycomb, honey and milk are under thy tongue. . . .[2]

585 174 The whole of this marriage ceremony is reminiscent of the old Fertility cults—the cakes, sweetmeats, nuts, grain, all in honour of the fertile Mother whose bountiful Earth is carried in a bowl bearing effigies of the bride and bridegroom whom it is hoped she will bless with her own fecundity and riches.

EVERYDAY HABITS

771 788 Grez, the housewife, will go about her daily tasks carefully following a thousand small rules, most of which have their English parallels. She will never cut a loaf without first making the Sign of the Cross on it with forefinger or knife. If the loaf falls to the ground, she will kiss it by way of asking pardon. She will not sweep her house after sunset for fear of [754] sweeping away good fortune. She will take care not to throw her "combings" out of doors. Should anyone wish her ill it

[1] *The Lost Language of Symbolism.* [2] *Song of Solomon*, IV, ii.

8:Brockman T-5 (no date) 1938
EZ6 Malta EZ6

will only be necessary for a "wise woman" or witch to spit on the hair while uttering a curse to bring misfortune upon the head which nourished it.

Grez will be careful not to laugh too heartily on a Friday—when the memory of the Crucifixion should make all sad. She will make the Sign of the Cross on leaving her house, on entering any vehicle or boat for no matter how short a journey, on cutting a piece of new cloth, before her baby's mouth when it yawns—so that evil spirits may not enter. On meeting a deformed or maimed person she will sign her corresponding limb or part of her body with the Cross.

When she brings flowers into her house she will be as careful to exclude the acacia as any West-country woman to avoid "may" or whitethorn, for the spiky Maltese acacia is the "thorn" of Palestine wherewith the Saviour was crowned.

These are but a few of the small ways in which the peasant woman pays a somewhat mixed homage to the Old Things as well as to the tenets of her Faith. In her favour it may be said that her "superstitions" are more logical than those of such folk who habitually "touch wood" or object to a third cigarette from one match.

THE FESTAS

The Festa, primarily a religious festival and a Holy Day of Obligation, provides the only relaxation for a hardworking and frugal people. Such simple pleasures as a meal of unaccustomed meat, a little wine, processions, and fireworks give full rein to the most lovable, childlike side of the national character. The importance attaching to these periodical holidays is well illustrated by an old rhyme:

8:Brockman T-5 (no date) 1938
EZ6 Malta EZ6

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THE SWEETHEART'S BARGAIN

In the marriage contract, they have it for a pact,
That he takes her to the Feste and sets her on a wall.
That he buys her cakes of sweetmeat, of the sort with hempseed made.
For that's the kind of sweetmeat a bride likes best of all.

It is believed that such a clause used actually to be embodied in the written contract drawn up by the parents and the go-between.

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[184]

Each little hamlet has its own feast, in honour of its own particular patron. Each has its own peculiar forms. Of the national feasts that of St. John naturally occupies a place of considerable importance. Certain aspects of its celebration, however, indicate that the Order of St. John was not alone responsible for the enthusiasm which this saint inspires. Busuttil, who has already been quoted at some length, writes of the Feast of St. John as follows:

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"Not unlike other nations, the Maltese are not indifferent in celebrating the Nativity of St. John by kindling great fires in the public streets, and giving their children dolls to carry in their arms on this day, in order to make good the prophecy respecting the Baptist 'Multi in nativitate ejus gaudebunt.'

Days and even weeks before this festival groups of children are seen going out into the country fields to gather straw, twigs, and all sorts of other combustibles which they store up for St. John's Eve.

On the night of June 23rd, the day before the festival of the Saint, great fires are kindled in the streets, squares, and market places of the towns and villages of the Island, and as fire after fire blazes out of the darkness of that summer night, the effect is singularly striking.

These fires are sometimes kept up for hours, being